Political Islam in West Africa and the Sahel

Ricardo Laremont, Ph.D., and Hrach Gregorian, Ph.D.

SINCE 9/11, defense of the homeland has become a particularly urgent issue for U.S. military planners. Consequently, foreign policy has shifted to address a new array of challenges to U.S. interests. Among the requirements of the new security environment is a deeper understanding of the global network of terrorist organizations inspired by or directly affiliated with Al Qaeda. There are at least three serious threats to U.S. security interests in West Africa and the Sahel. In order of priority, these are—

1. The emergence of radical, Al Qaeda-linked Islamic elements in Nigeria and Niger.

2. The existence of terrorist-financing networks involved in the purchase and sale of diamonds in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Proceeds from the sale of these "blood diamonds" are reported to fund Hizbullah; the Afwaj al Muquwamah al Lubnaiyyah (AMAL), or Lebanese Resistance Detachment; and Al Qaeda operations.

3. The migration of the Al Qaeda-linked Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) from southern Algeria to eastern Mauritania, northern Mali, northern Niger, and northern Chad, which indicates their intent to establish safe havens outside Algeria.

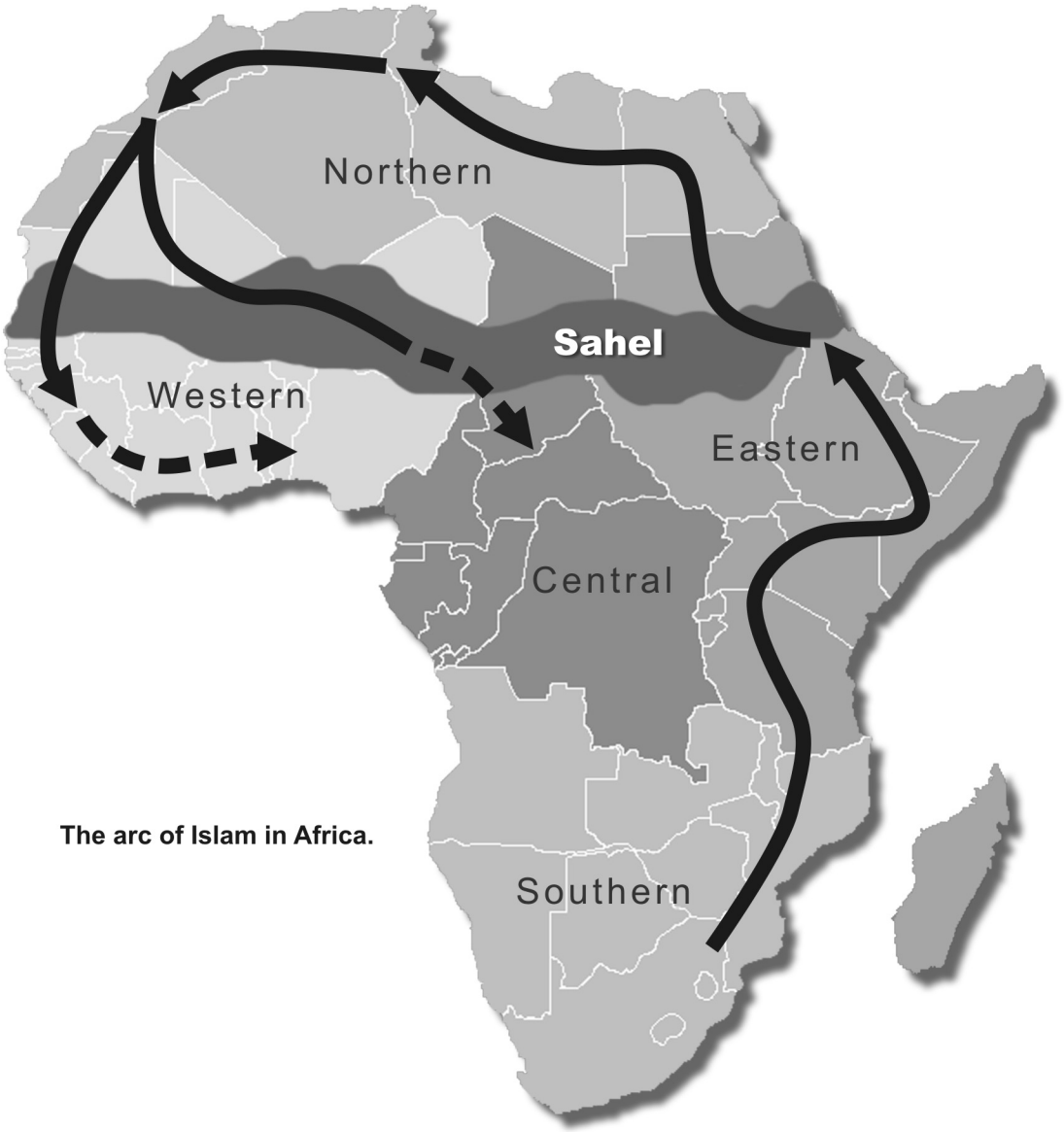
Where is West? Where is North?

The arc of Islam is almost a circle. The arc begins in South Africa, where there are substantial numbers of Muslims of South-Asian and Southeast-Asian origin, and stretches toward the northeast, touching Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. The arc continues north and west to include Sudan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco and then curves south to West Africa and the Muslim-majority countries of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Conakry, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, and arguably, Côte d'Ivoire. Burkina Faso, Ghana, Benin, Togo, and Liberia also contain substantial Muslim minority communities.

Our focus is primarily on the West African and Sahelian Islamic movements. It should be emphasized that Al Qaeda and other radical Islamic movements do not organize their activities according to traditional concepts of regional politics. Rather, Islamic movements in West and North Africa have always transcended regional boundaries. Therefore, we need to reexamine the rigid concepts of "North Africa" and "West Africa" embedded in many European and American perspectives. Such geographic distinctions have little relevance to leaders and participants in Islamic movements. They also obscure a complex picture, especially when adding countries of the Sahel (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad) to the mix. These countries are at the crossroads of North and West Africa. Within the Sahel, North and West are fluid concepts that often converge.

An example of this phenomenon is Algeria, an unstable country whose government effectively controls the capital. In Algeria's vast southern region, the state has a tenuous hold on power, and groups opposed to it and to the United States operate with considerable freedom. Within this underpopulated region, Osama bin-Laden has sustained the operations of the GSPC, which opposes the government in Algiers.

Not only has the GSPC attempted to overthrow the Algerian Government, it has sought to extend its ideology and operations into the Sahel. Because the Algerian Government cannot exercise police and military authority in southern Algeria, that region, nominally in North Africa yet adjacent to the Sahel, provides ample opportunity for penetration into West Africa. Communication between North Africa, the Sahel, and West Africa has occurred from at least the



The arc of Islam in Africa.

8th century, when merchants in gold, salt, and slaves opened trade routes there. Now those trafficking in ideas and arms are exploiting these same routes.[1]

Nigeria: Oil, Islamism, and Survival

Nigeria is relevant to U.S. security interests because it satisfies approximately 12 percent of America's petroleum needs. In January 2004, Nigeria was sixth in the world in exports to the United States, following Saudi Arabia, Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, and Iraq. New discoveries in the Bight of Benin mean that Nigeria, Angola, and Gabon will remain important to U.S. energy interests for the foreseeable future. With a population of well over 100 million people, Nigeria is also a regional player that has carried out sensitive, dangerous peacekeeping missions in neighboring states and, thus, is of keen interest to students of Islamic radicalism in West Africa.[2]

Islam in Nigeria. Islam was introduced to northern Nigeria during the 11th century. It was seriously practiced first in Kano during the 14th century. In the 16th century it was introduced in Katsina and in the 17th century in Zaria and Zamfara. It was during the early 19th century, however, that Islam first became a true political force in the north.[3]

Islamic politics and law emerged as important factors in the region when Uthman dan Fodio, a Muslim reformer, began a jihad movement in 1804

urging the creation of a Muslim state governed by a Muslim leader with Sharia (Islam law or the law of Allah) as the basis for law and governance. As a result of Dan Fodio's efforts, an Islamic state was created in the north in the 19th century, and with the implementation of Sharia, Islam moved from the social to the political realm. This precedent for Islamic government continues to reverberate in Nigeria.[4]

While Islam became the dominant religion in the north, it also obtained many converts among the Yoruba in the southeast, where it was most likely introduced during the 17th century. By the end of the 18th century, Islam had reached as far south as Lagos, and throughout the 19th century, it continued to expand. To hear northerners tell it, Yoruban Islam differs from that practiced in the north because of indigenous religious and Christian influences, which have created a more eclectic form of Islam that tends toward syncretism. This difference sometimes puts Yoruban Muslims at odds with the north's more puritanical practitioners.[5]

Nigeria's colonial legacy. Contemporary Nigeria is deeply divided. It is an artificial nation-state cobbled together originally by the British. For most of British colonial rule the Muslim north perceived itself as separate from the Christian and animist south. Furthermore, Britain ruled the two regions differently. British legal, governance, and administrative procedures were instituted in the south. In the north, the British governed through influential Muslim clerics and compliant local officials. The British modified indigenous practices as necessary to assure the continuation of colonial rule, but they did not fundamentally disturb Islamic practices. Still, to maintain control, they did manipulate local Muslim social and political institutions.[6]

Under Britain's indirect rule in northern Nigeria, the application of Islamic law advanced without hindrance. This was especially true with regard to personal law (for example, family, marriage, and inheritance law). British colonial administrators also permitted the application of Sharia in some aspects of criminal law, although they removed Sharia's more stringent penalties such as stoning for adultery and amputation or death for theft. In sum, British colonial practices allowed Islam to remain an important social and political force in the north.

Modern Nigerian politics. During the 1950s, the first 20th-century advocates for Sharia in Nigeria appeared. Islamist ideals became central to the goals of the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which became one of the most important political parties in Nigeria at the end of the colonial era. Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and a grandson of Dan Fodio, created the NPC in 1949. The organization was oriented toward the restoration of the Sokoto Caliphate and the application of Islamic law minimally to northern Nigeria but ideally to all of Nigeria. Bello labored assiduously for Muslim causes and Sharia during both the colonial and postcolonial periods. He also allied himself with Abubakar Gumi, a leading Muslim intellectual who established a critical link between the NPC and the Al Saud family in Saudi Arabia.[7]

External support to Nigerian Islamist parties, mosques, and madrasas is not new. During this early period, the Islamist party received external support from Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, Sudan, Lebanon, and Senegal. This support led to the expansion of Koranic schools and the use of Arabic as a meaningful language for communication.[8]

When Nigeria became independent in 1960, its new government attempted to deal with the legal traditions in the north and the south by creating a penal code for the north and a criminal code for the south. The new government also ended the colonial policy granting criminal jurisdiction to Sharia courts. In place of jurisdiction, it established a general Sharia appeal court. The court's staff included a chief Qadi (an Islamic judge), a deputy Qadi, and two other judges. However, these measures only partly pacified certain Muslim militants who wanted full restoration of Sharia to the north, including Sharia's sterner criminal laws and punishments.

Controversy over Sharia surfaced again in 1978 when Nigeria attempted to draft a new constitution. From 1956 until 1978, first the British colonial government and then the independent Nigerian Government permitted a northern regional constitution that consigned the administration of Islamic law to

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personal law matters only. In 1978, a new draft constitution recognized Sharia lower courts while at the same time creating a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal to hear and review Sharia case appeals. The 1978 draft, which became the 1979 constitution, displeased advocates for Islamic law because it provided for eventual Supreme Court review (that is, a nonreligious review) of Sharia court cases.[9]

Tension over the roles of Sharia in the Nigerian state and religion in Nigerian society led Islamic law proponents to flex their political muscle. Governors of the northern states strongly advocate Sharia, not least because they stand to gain much politically by taking such a stance. The governors' role in this advocacy arguably distinguishes Nigeria from other states in West and East Africa where radicalism is primarily articulated by Islamist organizations. Governmental initiatives to extend application of Sharia have disturbed Christians in the north and have led to unease throughout the rest of the country, mostly among non-Muslims. In northern Nigeria, the most conflict-ridden cities have included Kano and Kaduna, where there are substantial Christian communities. Smaller cities and towns in Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Bauchi, and Zaria have also experienced violence.[10]

In Nigeria, in addition to Sunni activism for Sharia, violence-prone Shia sects are emerging. These sects have been involved in clashes in Kano, Kaduna, and Zaria, where they are most prominent, and in Katsina, Maiduguri, and Bauchi. Most often led by Ibrahim al-Zakzaky, the sects refer to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as their source of inspiration for revolutionary leadership.[11]

From 1966 to 1999, Nigeria was ruled mainly by military leaders. In 1999, when a civilian government led by southerner Olusegun Obasanjo took power, governors in the Muslim north revived a call for the restoration of Sharia in all elements of social and political life. Since the restoration of democratic rule under Obasanjo, an estimated 10,000 Muslims and Christians have died in religious violence. Muslim and Sharia advocacy in the north and attending discomfiture among non-Muslims and southerners has created substantial political tension, severely weakening and, at times, threatening the stability of the country's nascent democratic regime. Obasanjo has been wary of challenging the northern governors on the question of implementing Sharia.[12]

Why has Islamic law gained such a following in northern Nigeria? For a citizenry fatigued by crime, corruption, and state ineffectiveness, it has great appeal. "Clean governance" had similar allure in Algeria, when the Front Islamique du Salut first began to organize.

The Sharia movement in the north has also advanced because of continued substantial support from external sources in Sudan, Iran, Libya, Syria, Palestine, and especially Saudi Arabia. In addition to overt Muslim philanthropic activity, funds for radical Islamic movements reach Nigeria via courier or through informal banking systems resembling the hawala of East Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. Because there are no paper trails for hawala banking transactions, it is well-nigh impossible to prove that these radical financing schemes exist. This evidentiary burden will, most likely, not be overcome.[13]

Besides Sharia advocacy, Islam also operates in Nigeria through the military. Northern Muslims dominate the Nigerian officer corps, a tradition carried over from colonial times when the British recruited primarily from northern Muslim communities. Most of the military leaders who ruled Nigeria between 1966 and 1999 were northern Muslims. Only a minority of those who served as chief of state were Yoruba or Igbo.[14]

Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire

After Nigeria and the Sahel, the region that should constitute the second area of concern includes Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire. In these countries, Lebanese merchants in particular and Al Qaeda-connected agents secondarily have trafficked in black-market diamonds, gold, coltan, and tanzanite. Over 100,000 Lebanese reside in Côte d'Ivoire, 6,000 in Sierra Leone (30,000 before the Sierra Leone civil war), and 20,000 in Senegal. Lebanese diamond merchants have at times willingly and at other times under pressure contributed to the fundraising activities of Hizbullah and AMAL. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Lebanese merchants linked to these organizations brokered illicit diamonds in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire, as well as in Angola, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Emerging research suggests that Al Qaeda, Hizbullah, and AMAL have occasionally merged their terrorist-financing initiatives.[15]

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Determining whether Al Qaeda continues to engage in illicit diamond trading in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire is difficult. U.S. law enforcement and intelligence officials have differing opinions. Public records, however, indicate that Al Qaeda, Hizbullah, and AMAL operatives still trade in diamonds to raise funds. David Crane, a former inspector general at the Pentagon and the current prosecutor for the Special Court on Sierra Leone, is certain that Al Qaeda is working in the region. Doing so, he says, because "no one is bothering with them [or] no one is checking on them."[16]

Al Qaeda operatives Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani (arrested in Pakistan on 25 July 2004), and Fazul Abdullah Muhammed used Lebanese contacts to establish diamond-buying and money-laundering operations in Sierra Leone from 1998 to 2001. These individuals had been trained by Abu Ubadiah al-Banshiri and Wadih El Hage (personal secretary to Osama bin-Laden) to trade diamonds in West Africa. Al-Banshiri and El Hage previously had traded in diamonds and other precious gemstones in Kenya and Tanzania from 1993 until 1997. On their arrival in Sierra Leone, Abdullah, Ghailani, and Muhammad established immediate contact with Aziz Nassour (an avid AMAL supporter and the principal diamond merchant for Zaïre's Mobutu Sese Seko) and Nassour's cousin Samih Ossaily, known diamond traffickers for AMAL and Hizbullah.[17]

Reportedly, in October 1998 El Hage sent Abdullah, Ghailani, and Muhammad to West Africa to sell diamonds for the express purpose of financing Al Qaeda terrorism. Evidence suggests that from 1998 until 2001, Al Qaeda raised millions of dollars from diamond sales, collaborating with existing Lebanese networks to make the deals possible. Al Qaeda operatives had experience laundering the profits from the sale of gemstones in Tanzania and Kenya, so they understood how easily money was to be made in such trade in West Africa. Charles Taylor, Liberia's former president, is said to have collaborated with Hizbullah, AMAL, and Al Qaeda operatives in their diamond-purchasing and money-laundering activities.[18]

Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire will remain of interest because Middle East and Al Qaeda elements traffic there in high-quality, uncut diamonds, which are resold in Antwerp, the United Arab Emirates, and Hong Kong. Besides diamonds, agents have also been active in trafficking gold, tanzanite, and coltan. Tanzanite mining in Tanzania is of special interest because the gem's miners and traders reportedly support Bin Laden. The Al-Taqwa mosque, led by Imam Sheik Omari, appears to be the center of Bin Laden's support in the Tanzania mining areas.[19]

The Sahel: Niger, Chad, Mali, and Mauritania

To date, Muslim militants have not enjoyed much success in the urban centers of Niger, Chad, Mali, and Mauritania. However, given the weakness of the governments and the general poverty of the region, these are fertile fields for the cultivation of radical Islam. Demographic and economic conditions in the region are quite similar to Afghanistan's. Moreover, Muslim militants are present and continue to proselytize.

The countries of the Sahel are sparsely populated and poor. Militant groups like the Algerian-based GSPC can encamp in these regions and go undetected for long periods of time. They promise the poor that Islamic government or a return to Sharia will alleviate their misery. A minority of the region's Muslim leaders have claimed that the area's extreme poverty and extraordinary reliance on foreign aid are the fruits of not living according to the principles of Islam and the dictates of Sharia. Furthermore, the four states have poorly funded, poorly trained military and police forces. This weakness has enabled Islamist forces, principally under the leadership of the GSPC, which is based in southern Algeria and connected to Al Qaeda, to infiltrate the region and create new bases for operations.[20]

Niger. Islam was brought to Niger as early as the 10th century by Tuaregs from the Fezzan region of Libya, just north of the Niger border. Niger has long been connected to Libya by trade routes. Niger also connects southward to the Hausa and Kanuri in Nigeria. While Niger's connection to Libya is meaningful, the relationship between Niger and Nigeria is profound. In Niger the quotidian languages are Hausa and French; in Nigeria they are Hausa and English. Niger is intimately linked to northern Nigeria by language, ethnicity, and religion.[21]

A multiethnic country of approximately 10 million people, Niger is 56 percent Hausa, 22 percent Djerma-Songhay, 8.5-percent Tuareg, 8-percent Fulani, and 4-percent Kanuri. Ninety percent of the population is Muslim. Within Niger's Muslim community, two strains of Islamic practice are evident: one steeped in mystical, subjective Sufi practice; the other adhering to stricter, Saudi/Wahhabi-inspired fundamentalism. Sufism finds its followers in Say, Tessaoua, Zinder, Maradi, Gouré, and Dosso. The Wahhabi-inspired Muslims have operated principally in Dosso and Maradi, where they have instigated violence against resident Sufis. The fundamentalists have organized themselves into two groups: the Association of Islamic Groups and Culture (led by Cheikh Souleiman Youssouf) and the Niger Islamic Association (led by El Haji Aboubacar Issa).[22]

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In addition to homegrown fundamentalist militant activities, the Algeria-based GSPC has reportedly organized attacks near the Chad border against the Niger Government. In the United States and Europe most attention has been rightly focused on Nigeria, especially with the rise of the Sharia movement in the North. Niger, however, cannot be ignored, given that Islamic organizing continues to take place there.

Because of its poverty, Niger is extremely reliant on foreign aid and philanthropy, which often come from the coffers of the Saudis, Moroccans, Libyans, and occasionally the Iranians. Niger also has one of the highest fertility rates in the world. This conjunction of extreme poverty (US$200 gross national product per capita) and high fertility has created conditions like those found in Afghanistan before the Taliban's rise. The danger exists that Niger, if ignored, could become hospitable to Islamic extremism. The ideology is already being planted in mosques and schools underwritten by the Saudis, Moroccans, Iranians, and Libyans. Noticeable numbers of teachers and clerics are arguing that political reform, the end of corruption, and the amelioration of economic life will be made possible by a return to a more militant form of Islam and the restoration of Sharia. Perceiving imbalances in U.S. Middle East policy, they focus their severest criticism on the United States.

Chad. Like its neighbors in the Sahel, Chad lies at the crossroads between north and sub-Saharan Africa. About four-fifths of its territory—almost the entire area north of the 10th parallel—is populated by Muslim peoples. In the south, too, principally in the larger cities, there are sizeable Muslim communities.

Chad has a population estimated at 9.25 million people with a growth rate of 3.07 percent (the world growth rate in 2003 was 1.17 percent). Of the total population, 54 percent are Muslim, approximately one-third are Christian, and the remainder practice traditional indigenous religions. The majority of Chadian Muslims adhere to a moderate branch of mystical Sufism known as the Tijaniyya, which incorporates some local African religious elements. Only a minority of the country's Muslims are considered fundamentalist. They are led by imam Mahamadou Mahamat, also known as Sheikh Faki Suzuki, in N'Djamena.

Because of Mahamat's fundamentalist activities, the Chadian Government banned him for extended periods from preaching, and from 1998 to 1999, he was under house arrest, being charged with inciting religious violence. In July 2002 the state's Superior Council of Islamic Affairs rebuked Mahamat and another imam, Haroun Idriss Abou-Mandela, for preaching religious and ethnic division. In 1999 the government arrested and detained for a year yet another imam, Sheikh Mahamad Marouf, for preaching anti-Tijaniyya diatribes. Adding to the problem are itinerant Muslim imams, principally from Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, who often visit Chad to preach.[23]

There are at least 200 ethnic groups in Chad, the most important being the Sara, the Arabs, the Maba, and the Toubou. The most numerous, the Sara, who reside mainly in the south, controlled Chadian politics from 1961 until the assassination of President Francois Tombalbaye in 1975 and the creation of a coalition government controlled by northerners in 1979.[24]

Next in importance are the Arabs. They have a significant presence in commercial activity, and

Arabic is second to French as the spoken language. Third among the ethnic groups are the Maba, who occupy central Chad and are concentrated in Abeche and Am-Dam. The Toubou are also of special interest. Historically active in insurgencies against established governments, the Toubou live in the northernmost regions of Borkou, Ennedi, and Tibesti and spill over into the Fazzan of Libya, creating an important Libyan connection.[25]

Understanding Chadian politics is impossible without considering Libyan and Sudanese interests. The three countries have been linked culturally and politically since at least the 8th century. For example, the first commercial road establishing commerce between Tripoli and the "Land of the Blacks" was the Garamantes road, which began in Tripoli then coursed through Ghadames, Libya, before ending at Gao in the Mali Empire. That commercial passage was established in 1500 B.C. by Berbers. To the east of the Garamantes road lie three other trade routes beginning in Tripoli and ending in Chad: the Bilma trail, the Darb al-Arabain or Forty Days Road, and a third route from Benghazi in Libya to Waddai in Chad. These four routes allowed for Libyan (and Egyptian) penetration into sub-Saharan Africa.

The most important fact about Islam in Chad is that it is practiced by approximately 55 percent of the population in the northern four-fifths of the country. These northern Muslims have religious connections to Libya and the western region of Sudan (especially Darfur), connections informed by 19th-century jihads initiated in Libya and Sudan. Also, Sufi brotherhoods, especially the Libyan Sanusiyya and the Sudanese Mahdiyya, have followers in Chad. [26]

After Chad gained independence in 1961, two ideological movements emerged from the Muslim community. Older Muslim leaders supported a conservative movement not oriented toward Islamic militancy. Younger Muslims, primarily in the south and center of the country, led a more militant faction with a pan-Islamist orientation.[27]

When the French transferred political control to Chad in 1961, the governmental offices were assigned to the Sara ethnic group in the south. This political empowerment of non-Muslim Sarans caused considerable consternation among Arab and Toubou Muslims in central and northern Chad. The northerners, in particular, had difficulty accepting black political leadership. Throughout the 1960s, Algeria, Egypt, and Sudan supported northern rebel movements that focused on wresting power from the leaders in the south. Moreover, northern Muslims often went to Khartoum and Cairo for religious education; thus, Chadian Muslims from the north deepened their ties with Islamists. On returning to Chad, they reorganized and launched military attacks on the Chadian Government. After Sadiq al-Mahdi's accession to power in the Sudan in 1966 and Muammar Qaddafi's seizure of power in Libya in 1969, Sudanese and Libyan support of Chadian Muslim rebels became more overt.[28]

Qaddafi was especially supportive of rebel efforts to change the Chadian Government. Qaddafi's pan-Islamist, pan-African orientation led him to dream of an "Islamic State of the Sahara" that would encompass Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, and Mali. In pursuit of that dream during the 1970s, Qaddafi tried to influence the outcome of political events in Chad, Sudan, and Niger. From the late 1970s on, he supported Chad's rebels, and on 6 January 1981 he declared the "complete unity" of Libya and Chad.[29]

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In 1982, Qaddafi declared his intention to incorporate Niger into Libya. These actions concerned the French Government, which wished to retain influence in West Africa. French military intervention, first to support Tombalbaye and then to support Chadian resistance leader Hissène Habré, reversed Qaddafi's military adventures in Chad. In turn, Qaddafi provided financial support for Idriss Déby—one of Habré's defectors—and Déby overthrew Habré in December 1990. Under both Habré and Déby, northern ethnic groups were most prominent in government, especially the Toubou, Zagahwa, Hadjerai, and Bedeiyat.

Déby, however, has been fairly consistent about monitoring and repressing insurgent Islamist movements, although this has not resulted in their complete elimination. In March 2004, it was reported that Chad's army had killed 43 members of the Algerian-based

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GSPC. Among the dead were individuals from Niger, Nigeria, and Mali. The presence of these non-Algerians in the GSPC reveals that the group successfully recruited outside Algeria, principally in the Sahel. Given the difficulty of surveillance in remote and often inaccessible areas, historical ties to regimes in Libya and Sudan, and now the penetration by GSPC operatives, Chad and Niger should be of considerable concern to those prosecuting the Global War on Terrorism.[31]

Mali. Mali's estimated population of over 11 million people can be divided according to northern groups (Tuaregs and Moors) and southern groups (Mande-language speakers such as the Bambara, Malinke, and Soninke). The southern group comprises 50 percent of the total population. Although each ethnic group speaks its own language, 80 percent of Malians communicate in Bambara.

Islam, introduced to Mali in the 11th century, has always been practiced in a rather moderate, tolerant form, with considerable leeway given to practitioners of Islam mixed with traditional African religions and to those who favor African religions in a purer form. The considerable influence of the Qadiriyya Sufi sect in Mali has moderated Wahhabi tendencies and helped counterbalance Saudi Arabian and Libyan support to Malian Islamic movements.

While Wahhabi-influenced jihad movements in Senegambia had some effect in Mali, that effect did not last long. Wahhabi or jihadist movements have not yet found a place in Malian society. Despite this tradition, a harder, more militant form of Islamic politics has appeared recently in Bamako, the capital. Imam Mahmoud Dicko, the influential director of Bamako's Islamic Radio, is the leader of this movement. Dicko has asserted that former President Alpha Oumar Kanoré's close relationship with the United States has contributed to and accelerated Mali's poverty.[32]

Coupled with the GSPC's appearance in the Sahel, Dicko's anti-U.S. campaign might inspire groups like the Tuaregs, who rebelled against the central government in the early 1990s, to throw in their lot with the jihadists. The remoteness and general inaccessibility of the Saharan regions of Mali, Chad, Niger, and Mauritania make them ideal locations for the organization of terrorist networks.

Mauritania. Islam appeared in Mauritania before the 11th century in a syncretic form common to the Sanhaja Berbers. During the 11th century a more traditionalist form of Islam arose when the Almoravids, a group originating in Morocco, initiated a jihad to purify the practice of Islam in the region. After succeeding with the Sanhaja in Mauritania, the Almoravids extended their reform movement to the kingdoms of Ghana in present-day Mali and Takrur in present-day Senegal.[33]

Mauritania has a population of almost 3 million people. Of that number, 30 percent are Moors (a mixture of Arab and Berber); 30 percent are blacks from the Peul/Fulani, Soninke, and Wolof ethnic groups; and 40 percent are of mixed race (Moor/black). The languages spoken are the Hassaniya dialect of Arabic, the official language; Wolof, another official language; French; Pulaar; and Sonike. Most of Mauritania's people inhabit Nouakchott, the capital; Rosso, a city to the south; and Nouadhibou, a city to the north.

To date, Islamic activism has not been noticeable in Mauritania's cities. The chief security concern has been Mauritania's eastern border with Algeria, which is desolate, difficult to patrol, and ideal for trafficking of arms and harboring Islamic militants from Algeria. Like Mali, Niger, and Chad, Mauritania cannot police its borders adequately. Enhancement of surveillance capabilities in the more remote regions of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Algeria will enhance counterterrorism efforts in the region.[34]

Beyond the border-security question, another source of apprehension involves foreign philanthropic activity by Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Qatar, which have played important roles in building mosques and Islamic schools in Mauritania and in inciting anti-American sentiment. To deal with this concern, the Mauritanian Government actively monitors mosques, madrasas, and the foreign philanthropic organizations that support them.[35]

Mauritania's authoritarian government often suppresses religious and political activities it perceives as threatening. The politics of repression, however, are simultaneously effective and counterproductive. While the government has successfully suppressed emerging Islamist threats, it has simultaneously pro-

voked antigovernment resistance among dissenters. These dissenters are good targets for recruitment by clandestine Islamist organizations.

Senegambia: Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry

Before the creation of Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Guinea-Conakry by colonial powers, the region was one unit, hereafter referred to as Senegambia. Islam in this region had its origins in the kingdom of Takrur, which lay along the Senegal River in present-day Senegal. Fakrur became a Muslim state during the 11th century. By the 13th century, Islam had spread to the adjacent kingdom of Jolof, just to the west of Takrur. In the rest of Senegambia, Islam spread but in a syncretic form (mixed with traditional African religions). Islam spread to the Wolof, Tukolor, and Fulani peoples of present-day Senegal during the 17th century. Muslim educators from Senegal, called the Jakhanke, ventured further south during the 18th century and spread Islam in the Futa Jallon of present-day Guinea-Conakry.[36]

During the 19th century, Umar (bin-Said) Tall, like his contemporary Dan Fodio, emerged in Senegal as a major reformer of syncretist Islam. After pilgrimage to Mecca in 1828, Tall returned to Senegal and initiated a jihad to reform Muslims and resist French colonialism. The jihad lasted from 1853 until Tall's death in battle in 1863. Tall succeeded in extending Islam to the Futa Toro region of Senegal and among the Bambara peoples of present-day Mali and (with his son Ahamadu) in resisting the French.[37]

By the 20th century, Islam was well emplaced as Senegal's major religion. Encouraged by several Sufi brotherhoods, Islam gave Senegambia arguably a more pacific orientation. One of the early leaders of the Sufi brotherhood was Ibrahim Niass, who became influential in Senegal as well as in West Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East. He espoused jihad of the heart rather than of the sword, an approach that pushed Muslims in Senegambia toward passive but resolute resistance to Western colonialism rather than radical violence. Another leading group was the Muridiyya, who also advocated a pacific Islam. From their beginning, through the leadership of Falilou M'Backe, the Muridiyya have been committed to work, frugality, and pacifism rather than militancy.[38]

Burkina Faso, Northern Ghana, Northern Togo

The last regions that constitute an area of interest in tracking the paths of radical Islam in West Africa include Burkina Faso (a Muslim country where considerable arms smuggling takes place), northern Ghana, and northern Togo (which has sizable Muslim communities).

Islam was established in the savannah regions just north of Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Togo in the 11th century by Muslim traders. When these men ventured south during the 14th century to seek gold and kola nuts, they took Islam with them. Not until the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, however, did Islam attract substantial numbers of converts in the region, principally among the Asante of Ghana and the Temne of Sierra Leone. The Ghanian Muslims centered their activities in Kumasi where, being a minority community, they had to negotiate for political and civil rights with the leader of the Asante community, the Asantehene. In Kumasi, Muslims became influential in the commerce of gold, kola, salt, and slaves.

During the last quarter of the 19th century, the Black Napoleon, Samory Toure, created the Muslim state of Wasulu in what now constitutes Burkina Faso and northern Côte d'Ivoire. After Toure's military and political exploits, Islam continued to develop on a moderate basis in the region until the end of the century.[39]

During the 20th century, Wahhabism was introduced to Côte d'Ivoire. Its principal propagandist was Al-Hajj Tiekedo, who completed the hajj to Mecca in the late 1930s and returned to Bouaké to proselytize. Cote d'Ivoire's trend toward Wahhabism contrasted with the jihad of the heart espoused by Niass in Senegal. Thus, Cote d'Ivoire has experienced considerable instability since 2002, when rebel groups originating in the Muslim north organized a coup d'etat. The rebels are aligned with Alassane Outtara, an effective politician with roots in the Muslim north and Burkina Faso. The rebels claim they have been marginalized from politics since the death of President Felix Houphouet-Boigny in 1993, and seek redress.[40]

In Sum

Radical Islam has a footprint in West Africa, but not one as pronounced and deep as in other parts of the continent. Of most significance are the weaknesses of many regimes in this area, their inability

to monitor events in remote regions, and the vulnerability of impoverished populations to proselytizing and recruitment by radical Muslim elements affiliated with or drawing inspiration from Al Qaeda. Given the importance of Nigeria to U.S. national-security interests and the effect on Nigeria of developments in other countries of the region, West Africa certainly warrants continuous monitoring.

Trade in diamonds and the illicit transfer of gains from such trade continues to be problematic even if the international community has lost interest in this matter or moved on to other, more pressing issues. However, GSPC activities will only increase unless they are strongly resisted by local regimes backed by the United States and other powers with security and economic interests in the region. ***MR***

NOTES

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Ricardo René Laremont is an associate professor of political science and sociology, State University of New York-Binghamton, and a research analyst for IAQ, Inc. He received a B.A. from New York University and a Ph.D. from Yale University. He is the author of Islam and the Politics of Resistance in Algeria, 1783-1992 *(Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999), and several other books.*

Hrach Gregorian, an expert in conflict resolution, is Vice President, Consulting Services, IAQ Inc.; president of the Institute of World Affairs; and president and chief executive officer of de novo group. He received a B.A. and a Ph.D. from Brandeis University and has worked in Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Israel, Northern Ireland, and many other countries.